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THE RECRUIT.

BY

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THE RECRUIT.

YOU have not forgotten the time when you were a recruit, a raw recruit. You did not become one without a struggle. There was much to be gone through, much to be thought of. To draw the line between the demands upon you, to strike the balance, was no easy thing. On the one side was inclination, on the other was duty, perhaps a conflict of duties. Home, its pursuits and affections, bade you stay ; your country, her perils and honor, bade you go. There were the hopes and plans of a lifetime to be set aside ; parents and wives and children to be thought of, provided for ; everything you loved to be left. Behind were the prizes of the heart ; before, every uncertainty, privation, suffering, possibly death. You have not forgotten the fearful struggle, nor the hour when, at last, your mind made up, you turned your back on home, forsook your place and duties as a citizen, and in a strange garb offered yourself to your strange vocation. Did you ever experience a sensation like that when you first realized that you were a recruit ?

What a mystery seemed to you then the intricacy of military movements. Should you ever become a soldier? Would any amount of drill make easy, familiar, natural, the things you tried to do with such difficulty and conscious awkwardness? What a marvel to you of the "awkward squad" was the dress parade, the manual, the movements by company and by battalion! Should you ever get your "facings," manage that "right-about," that "load in nine times," ever remember to keep that "left foot" always to the front? Do you not smile sometimes as you look back at those first efforts, and wonder that you should ever have been so perplexed about that which has become as a second nature, now that you feel, as a young friend told me he did, as if you had never been anything but a soldier?

You have given yourself as a recruit in one service: I want you now as a recruit in another. It is a better service, its rewards are greater and more sure, its victories are more complete, and the peace that follows can never be broken.

A better service! How can that be? I have entered the service of my country. I have given my all to her. I am pledged to stand by her even with my life. And my country! to the world, to me, she is the type of freedom. In her earliest days she proclaimed the great gospel of *liberty*. It is that which we of the army to-day proclaim anew,—that which we will establish once and forever, or we will die. Can I be in a better service?

Yours is indeed a noble service, but I ask you to enter a nobler. You have done well so far. I would ask you to do better. You have sacrificed much. I would ask you to sacrifice more. There is a service, — you know what one I mean, — and it wants recruits. Shall it not have you for one?

I know it is not an easy thing to be a soldier of the cross. I know that a great many men are deterred from enlisting under it by the difficulties which meet them at once, by demands so unlike those they meet in life, by duties so much more exacting, and burdens so much more heavy. When men are asked to become religious, they almost always draw back. It seems too difficult. How shall they ever get those things, — faith, a habit of prayer, resignation to another will, a love for God, for Christ, a hope, a desire, for heaven? Perhaps it is so with you. You hear men talk about certain beliefs, about certain results, about pleasure in certain exercises and duties, and you see, too, that they do not merely talk, but have in themselves, very prominent and strong, certain things you know nothing about. You would like to, but how are you ever to do it? How shall you begin? When you have begun, how are you to be at ease in such new work and society?

Have you forgotten your experience as a recruit? While you merely looked on, it seemed impossible for you to master the intricacies of manual and evolution, but the moment you were in the ranks,

heartily at work on the problem, its solution began to come, and you were amazed to find yourself with such ease and rapidity advancing "in the school of the soldier."

The recruit in this better service will have a like experience. Stand outside, merely look on, and nothing is more impossible, unreal. Enlist, set yourself at work heartily to learn. I do not say that the things of a holy life — experiences, powers, peace, which are the privileges of the mature Christian — shall at once be yours; but this, that the light begins to dawn, it fringes the horizon of your endeavor, and perseverance will bring about and establish the noon of unclouded attainment. The recruit will grow to the veteran. Do not say that you do not get ahead. Do not get discouraged. Do not throw down your arms. You have labored days at the manual, weeks at the bayonet-drill. You had to keep at it. You gained very slowly. Little by little, through patience, experience, discipline, you have got this facility of handling your arms and yourself. By these you have become a soldier of your country, and by the same things are you to become a soldier of the cross.

And what are the things necessary to the soldier of the cross, which to the recruit seem so hard to attain?

1. *Faith*. That is the first thing. The Saviour always asked for it first. If the man had it, then he

went on to do the miraele, then he told him he was forgiven, then he assured him he was not far from the kingdom. He did not expeet of him at once that complete faith which only a long experience gives; but a belief in what he told him, and a purpose to do as he commanded. A thorough faith would in time grow out of that.

Now it is a very simple thing, and not so very difficult, to have faith. Men have been made to think that it was some great mystery, and they must go through certain processes before they could have it. They were not to get it in any natural way, but by some strange, unusual methods. It was something to be sent you, not something you were to get yourself. But faith is a thing you have been having ever since you were born. You had it before you knew it, so soon as your mother's smile showed you that she was your dearest friend. You had it all the way through your childhood, in your parents, in your teachers, in your elders. Every day of life, in all your interecourse with men, you have been obliged to exereise it. You have it to-day in your commander, in your cause. It lies at the bottom of all your doing in life, only you have not exereised it toward the great Unseen Being. All you want is to lift up the same feeling till it can lay hold upon God. You want to have the same trust, confidence, in Him that you had in your mother, that you have in man, only it needs to be without drawback, and

multiplied by infinity. Even mothers with their dear love mistake, and men of noblest purpose sometimes fail, but there is neither failure nor mistake with God.

That is what you want to do at first, — to say with all your heart, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief,” that is, take every weakness out of my faith, and make it strong and complete. Then, when this is obtained, it will begin to work. You will find yourself gradually getting new light, new strength, new desires, dropping the habits and wishes of the old life, and putting on what the Apostle calls “the new man.” Life after the Master grows from this as the fruit from the seed, and it obeys the same law, — first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

2. It is just so about prayer. Men shrink from it, do not know how to take hold of it, because they think it something one side, beyond all their experience. But it is not so. They have been asking all their lives, and asking because they wanted, and expected to obtain by the asking. It is doing to God just what you used to do every day at home to your father and mother. Prayer is simply asking God what you want, with the conviction that he will give it to you if it is best for you. That is just the spirit in which you asked at home. It is the simplest, easiest thing in the world. Many think they cannot pray unless they use precise and formal

language, unless they are on their knees, or by themselves, or in a church, unless they use certain forms, and a certain length. It is not so. Did you ever repeat to your mother that little verse which John Quincy Adams repeated every night through his long life,—

“Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep”?

Do you remember the Lord's Prayer? These two have probably been repeated more times than any other prayers. Every day God hears them from almost myriad lips, and blesses as he hears. These are not long or formal. No prayer that the Saviour offered was. What prayer could say more, or show a deeper love for man or confidence in God than his last,—“Father, forgive them; they know not what they do”? The Prodigal's prayer,—“Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called thy son”; the Publican's,—“God be merciful to me a sinner,”—prove how unlike the formal prayers men deem it necessary to make are the effectual, fervent prayers that avail. All you need is to have a want, to feel that God can help you, to ask him, in the shortest, simplest way, anywhere, at any time. When you become an older Christian, prayer will become something more, lead you further, lift you higher, than it can now. You know that is the law with everything. Aim first at simple, brief petitions. Ask, nothing doubting. That is prayer.

“Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.”

3. I suppose it will specially trouble you to do right, to turn away from old follies and habits and sins, and lead such a life as you know you ought to, as you know God requires. Well, that is a pretty hard thing to do, but not half so hard as you think, if you will only be in right down earnest about it. Earnestness is half a battle. The determination to conquer is half the victory, and if it be true, as the proverb says, “It is the first step which costs,” then the other half is the easier.

I think I have one piece of advice which may possibly help you. Don't undertake too much at once. Don't expect to overcome all the wrong in you at a dash. Understand that it is going to be a long work with you, — a life-long work, — and begin deliberately and to go on resolutely. Do as you would in a siege. Make your approaches, establish your parallels, start your sap, trust in little steady gains, rather than in assaults. I should say that the best thing you could do would be to form a general resolve to quit all old wrong ways, and grow into all good ones, and then pay special attention to some one at a time. Get it thoroughly out of the way and then go to the next. For instance, if you are a profane man, take hold of swearing first. Watch yourself in every other direction, but let

your first, special attention be given here till the habit is gone. So you will see some gain. You know it is better to concentrate your fire than to scatter it. If a man once sees a habit fairly down, something definite done, he takes courage. He finds out what he can do, and presses on to further victories, while a general purpose of reform, or an equal attack on all his sins at once, will show, and probably make little real gain.

This is the way in which I would advise you to begin, no more expecting to be an accomplished Christian at once than the recruit expects to be an accomplished soldier at once. Gradually, and through patient effort, the better life will grow upon you, and these things which seem now so strange, so difficult, will become easy and familiar.

There is one grand help to this. When you first enlisted I dare say you bought a manual — Casey, perhaps — and set yourself down to make yourself a soldier by studying that. What a hopeless task that was! You could hardly do the simplest thing by it. But after you got into the ranks, and had some little experience, you went back to your Casey, and it was a new book and a great help. The Christian recruit will find a similar experience. If he sits down with his Bible, and expects to study himself into a Christian, he will grow gray and make no advance. The Saviour teaches better. He says, "If any will do his will, he shall know of the

doctrine"; that is, let a man set to work to do what is right, and that very effort will explain to him his duties, — not doctrines, the tenets of a creed, but the things to be taught him, the great demands of life. Every man finds it so, — that doing strangely explains and simplifies the Divine Word, and that he can go to it from his own experiences, however crude, and find that a very lamp to his feet which, prior to his experience, had been only darkness. So do not expect reading your Bible to make you a Christian; do not expect merely your own efforts to make you a Christian; but work and read, work and pray. Let the book help your effort, let the effort help the book, and you will find these two working in harmony, each supplementing the other, together making that power which shall ransom you from the thrall of evil, and elevate you into the coveted, holy life.

Have, then, no despair. Have patience; toil, wait. The soul that is but a recruit to-day shall receive reward as the conquering veteran hereafter.